



## National Athlete Profiles

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**Bernard Gibson**  
**Army Veteran**

**74 years old**  
**Washington, D.C.**

It wasn't long ago that Bernard Gibson underwent triple bypass surgery for blocked arteries caused by high cholesterol. Today, he's an exceptional athlete, maintaining his steadfast commitment to healthy living.

Only a year after his surgery, Gibson was competing again in the U. S. Senior Olympics. This year, he'll compete in another national event, this one for the 13th time – the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Gibson often shares his athletic talent and commitment to healthy living with other military Veterans. Giving back to his country wasn't a one-time thing for Gibson. Twice each week as a volunteer at the VA Medical Center in Washington, D.C., he personally coaches Veterans who are recovering in the nursing home.

About his fellow competitors, Gibson said, "I am gratified to see their changes in attitude and outlook on life, the physical progress they've made, and their improved athletic ability."

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**Beverly Smith**  
**Navy Veteran of WWII**

**90 years old**  
**Babylon, N.Y.**

At the age of 90, Beverly Smith is a long way from slowing down. She still competes in sports, trains for her events and does her own gardening. She keeps up the same Long Island home she's lived in since 1949. Attending the past 18 National Veterans Golden Age Games, Smith has collected an impressive array of winning medals, including the "George Gangi Most Inspirational Athlete" award in 2000.

A World War II Navy Veteran, Smith was stationed stateside in Iowa from 1945-46, serving as an aviation machinist mate – an airplane mechanic – for pre-flight crews, accompanying them on long flights across the country. After leaving the service, she moved to North Babylon on Long Island's south shore and started working at the Northport VA Medical Center in 1950. Her VA job obviously suited her well – she retired at age 77, after 47 years of government service.

"I think this is just an excellent thing," Smith says about the Games. "I hope it continues forever, because lots of older Veterans don't have anything to look forward to like this. But with the Games, they can practice all year, come with their teammates and really enjoy themselves. I think it's one of the best things VA (the Department of Veterans Affairs) has ever done."



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**Frank Renteria**  
**Navy and Marine Corps Veteran of Vietnam**  
**63 years old**  
**Lemoore, Calif.**

Marine Corps veteran Frank Renteria proves that you can get up after you fall – literally. At the 2007 National Veterans Golden Age Games, one of his goals was to finish the bicycling race. But a major crash on the course, in which he later learned he had broken three ribs, nearly derailed his plans. Despite his scrapes, bruises and broken bones, Renteria got back on his bicycle and finished the race, earning a gold medal in the process. His determination and commitment also earned him the 2007 George Ganji Inspiration Award.



Renteria entered the Navy in 1964, just two weeks after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. A short time later, he was on the way to Vietnam. In 1967, he left the Navy and saw his life tumble into a downward spiral. He found himself partying more and working less, only maintaining a job long enough to sustain his lifestyle. “Luckily, I still had enough sense to say to myself, ‘I need to get out of here,’” he remembers. At age 29, 11 years after leaving the Navy, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. “It was the beginning of a new life for me,” he says. “The Marines changed my whole attitude.”

“It’s a great feeling competing with other vets,” he says. “Just the effort some of them have to go through to compete is amazing. When I see an amputee pushing through, my bumps and bruises can’t even compare.”

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**Marilyn Hilliard**  
**Army Veteran**  
**77 years old**  
**Butler, Pa.**

“It ain’t bragging if you can do it!” While the phrase is attributed to legendary baseball great Babe Ruth, it could apply just as well to retired schoolteacher and Army Veteran Marilyn Hilliard. If she wasn’t so humble, you might think she was bragging when she speaks of her numerous athletic feats. If she is, though, she has undoubtedly earned the right.

In 2007, the spirited and talented Hilliard entered the National Veterans Golden Age Games, the Pennsylvania Senior Games, and the Summer National Senior Games in Louisville, Kentucky. Out of the 13 events she entered, she medaled in 11. Hilliard was the first Veteran ever representing the National Veterans Golden Age Games to medal at the National Senior Games, taking the silver in horseshoes.

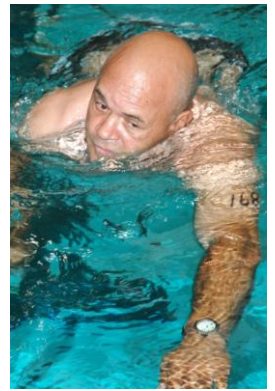


“I’ve always been patriotic,” she says in an endearing and solemn voice, launching into a description of the American flag she proudly displays at her home. “My flag is never tattered or torn, and I always get the flag with the stitched on stars and stripes.”

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**Walter Evans, Jr.**  
**Army and Marine Corps Veteran of Vietnam**  
**62 years old**  
**Lumberton, N.C.**

If falling from the heights of a barn hasn't stopped Walter Evans Jr., 62, from moving forward with his life, not much will. The fall occurred in 1999, severing Evans' spinal cord and leaving him a paraplegic. Since then, the Army and Marine Corps Veteran continues to stay active despite the pain in his lower back and legs. While the physical activity keeps his pain to a minimum, it's the competition that keeps him motivated.



Evans has been honing his competitive skills with help from his rehabilitation therapist at the Fayetteville, N.C., VA Medical Center. He now lifts weights, plays in a wheelchair basketball league and shoots pool to get ready for the competition.

Evans served in the engineer corps during his 1968-1970 Army tour in Vietnam. Thirty days after his discharge from the Army, he joined the Marine Corps. Later, he worked at an adhesive manufacturing company for nearly twenty years. Due to the injuries he sustained from his fall, Evans now uses a wheelchair for mobility, but is able to walk short distances.

"I never thought I would be able to take part in these sports," Evans says. "For me, this is really a dream come true."

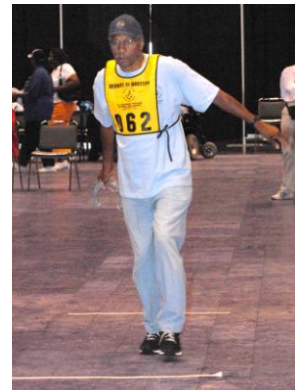
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**Clarence L. Braxton**  
**Army Veteran**  
**79 years old**  
**Hampton, Va.**

A quintessential athletic champion at a young 79 years of age, Clarence Braxton stands at the ready to challenge the competition at the 24<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Golden Age Games this year.

A native of Newport News, Va., Braxton entered the Army in 1954 and served for six years, occupying an eclectic number of positions within the United States and in Germany, including one as battalion commander. Subsequent to his military service, Braxton pursued a 30-year career in academics, first as an industrial arts teacher and later in high school administration.



He stays physically fit by swimming regularly at the local YMCA. The training helps him stay competitive, not only at the national Veterans' event but also at the state-level Virginia Games as well as the National Senior Games. Last year, he returned home with a gold and a silver medal in swimming. In 2010, Braxton will again take part in the swimming, shuffleboard and horseshoe competitions.

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**Donald Mullett**  
**Combat Army Air Corps Veteran of WWII**  
**94 years old**  
**New Haven, Conn.**

Donald Mullett still lives in the same house in New Haven, Connecticut where he was born – 94 years ago. He takes care of himself, keeps up the house, does some gardening and goes swimming as often as he can. Until 2007, he taught a twice weekly class in ballroom dancing. Only a year before that, he had to give up ice skating, a sport he's enjoyed since he was seven. Mullett says that his doctor told him, "Donald – you're not *getting* old, you *are* old. You can't do everything you did ten years ago!"

That was tough news for this WWII combat Veteran of the Army Air Corps, who served from 1941-45 in the south Pacific in Guadalcanal, working on long range radar. After his military service, Mullett worked at a hardware manufacturing company for 45 years until his retirement in 1981. Since then, he's stayed active and kept in shape with callisthenic exercises, lifting weights, swimming, ice skating, and teaching his dance classes in both ballroom and country line dancing techniques. A model of healthy living, he has enjoyed the constant activity which he credits, in part, for his longevity.

"Sign up, train and learn the rules. You've got to do that no matter what age you are, but even if you haven't been active for a very long time, the National Veterans Golden Age Games will turn you around," he says. Take it from Donald Mullett."

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**Wayne Field**  
**Combat Wounded Army Veteran of WWII**  
**84 years old**  
**Colorado Springs, Colo.**

A self described "Dennis the Menace" for being a bit of a prankster, Wayne Field still enjoys an adventure and a place on special boxes of Cheerios dedicated to support of military families. After basic training, he shipped off to Europe, joking that he "took a cruise across the Atlantic at the government's expense." He joined Patton's Third Army, 6th Armored Division, as a jeep driver and infantryman.



In December 1944, he arrived in Luxemburg on the third day of the Battle of the Bulge. During the war, he had several harrowing experiences. Once, while crossing a field on a mission to take a town, Field was shot in the leg and forced to lie in the freezing snow before being taken to the hospital. As soon as he recovered, he went back to his unit.

Another time, in April 1945, he was almost taken prisoner of war near Hessisch-Lichtenau, Germany. Field was separated from his convoy while helping direct traffic. As he tried to catch up, he drove down into Hessisch-Lichtenau and saw what he believed to be an abandoned German tank. Suddenly, the turrets turned and started firing in his direction. Field and two fellow soldiers jumped from their jeep and ran to an apartment house. They hid inside, not realizing that the German army was encamped in the adjacent building. For several days, Field was trapped in the apartment's basement. One night, he and the other two soldiers managed to escape back to their jeep. With some luck, they made it back to their unit.

During the time he was trapped in the building, Field came upon a German civilian who risked his own life by not turning in the American soldiers. In 2004, he returned to Hessisch-Lichtenau where he had been trapped 60 years earlier and narrowly escaped becoming a prisoner of war.

"The National Veterans Golden Age Games improves my mind and body and gives me a reason to exercise regularly," he said.



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**Jack Faust**  
**Combat Navy Veteran of WWII (Pacific Theater)**  
**99 years old**  
**Hayward, Calif.**

At 99 years old, one might think that Jack Faust has seen it all, The Great Depression, World War II where he was a combat Veteran and all the world's changes since then.

For him, the National Veterans Golden Age Games hold a special place in his heart as he says, "I enjoy the camaraderie with all of the Veterans at the Games and competing against them." The oldest Veteran competing in the Games in the recent past, Faust has been honored by presenting the Pledge of Allegiance at either Opening or Closing Ceremonies of the event.

His competition events this year are bowling, checkers and shuffleboard.

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**Robert Blatnik**  
**Combat Wounded Army Veteran of WW II**  
**90 years old**  
**Rowlett, Texas**

*Living life to the fullest* is a motto that Robert Blatnik has adhered to throughout his long life, and he is not short on stories that are clear examples. Animated and lively, his eyes glint with excitement while sharing just a few of his experiences that command your attention, pulling you into his world.

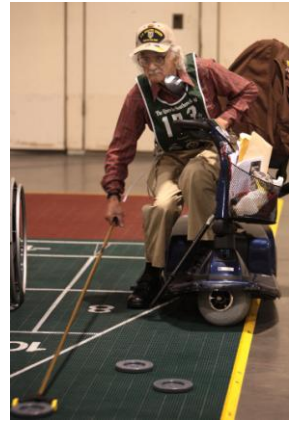
Blatnik joined the Army in October 1938, serving under General Patton as a Battalion Sergeant Major in the famous 1st Armored Division, nicknamed the "Big Red One." He was among those who stormed the beaches at Normandy more than 65 years ago. For this service, Blatnik earned 13 medals, including the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart. Despite these accomplishments, a humble Blatnik said, "I'm not a hero, I'm a human being."

As one of the best swimmers in the National Veterans Golden Age Games, Blatnik trains in the pool seven days a week whenever possible, despite his arthritis. He has earned many medals during his six years participating in the Games. He has no plans to slow down any time soon.

Last year, Blatnik had the honor of receiving the George Gangi Inspiration Award, given to the athlete who most demonstrates physical fitness, sportsmanship and competitive skill – a true tribute to this American hero.

"Exercising, earning medals and meeting friends have given me a reason to live," said Blatnik. He looks forward to continuing the competition at the 2010 Games in Des Moines, Iowa.

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**Julius Flieschman**  
**Combat Army Veteran of WW II**  
**88 years old**  
**Washington, D.C.**

For Julius Flieschman, life is an adventure. Whether he's involved in death-defying extreme sports such as skydiving – one of his many hobbies – or competing with old friends at the National Veterans Golden Age Games, Flieschman is one of a kind.

His fearless nature was apparent even during his service as an Army private in WW II, when he practically crossed enemy lines during the Battle of the Bulge to observe the enemy. He earned two Bronze Stars and a Silver Star during his tenure.



Flieschman is gearing up for his fifth time competing in the National Veterans Golden Age Games, which presents a new challenge this year as he prepares to defend his gold medal in shuffleboard. He has also competed in horseshoes, discus and bowling.

“I’m always looking for a challenge,” said Fleischman. “I like to stay active to keep motivated and give myself inspiration.”

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**Charles Wynder**  
**Army Veteran**  
**67 years old**  
**Williamsburg, Va.**

For Charles Wynder, the National Veterans Golden Age Games are all about the challenge of staying physically fit throughout the year.

Wynder, an eight-year participant, keeps the Games in mind during his daily exercise routine of swimming and biking. Not only does the training prepare him for the competition that unfolds every year at the Games, but it is also therapeutic for a knee injury he sustained while serving on active duty.



Whatever Wynder’s secret is, it must be working for him as he won gold in all four of his events the last time he competed at the event in 2008.

Aside from the challenge and motivation involved in competing in the Golden Age Games, Wynder looks forward to meeting new friends and seeing the ones he missed last year.

“The Golden Age Games are the capstone program of athletic competition in my age group,” said Wynder. “It inspires me to train on a regular basis and gives me new motivation.”

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**Ira Walton**  
**Army Combat Veteran of WW II, the Korean War and Vietnam**  
**87 years old**  
**Waco, Texas**

Ira Walton was a special kind of soldier, having served in three of this Nation’s major conflicts – WW II, the Korean War and Vietnam.

Even serving in combat didn’t stop Walton though, and now the spry octogenarian is preparing to participate in his 21st year at the National Veterans Golden Age Games.

Walton is one of the most formidable opponents you could have in table tennis, having won gold 18 years out of 20. He does equally well at checkers, winning a total of 19 gold medals in his years competing.

Walton believes that the National Veterans Golden Age Games are really about maintaining your health physically and mentally, and that concentrating on winning medals helps a person keep in shape.

This year, he is anxious to return to the energy and spirit that surrounds the Games and see the friends he’s made over the years. He is also ready to earn gold medals number 19 and 20 in table tennis and checkers, respectively.

“The Games are something you look forward to every year and the closer it gets, the more excited you get,” said Walton. “It’s kind of like waiting for Christmas to come when you were a little kid.”

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